

Some Remarks on Plateau 10: Becoming-Intense

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13 April, 1999

1. The key term of Plateau 10, *devenir*, is one of the relatively few cases where the translation of D/G into English is problematic. Relatively few, that is, compared with the absolute necessity of reading Derrida or Irigaray in French, for instance. This is due to three factors: 1) D/G's insistence on the primacy of the concept (philosophy is the creation of concepts, they declare in *What is Philosophy?*); 2) their disdain of treating language in terms of signifiers; 3) their abjuring of "typographical cleverness, lexical agility, ... syntactical boldness" [22E/33F] in favor of a method that will construct the multiple. As they say in a famous passage a little earlier in the "Rhizome" plateau: "It is not enough to say 'Long live the multiple' ... No typographical, lexical or even syntactical cleverness is enough to make it heard. The multiple must be made [*Le multiple, il faut le faire*]" (6E/13F). Other examples of translation difficulties would include, as Massumi notes: *puissance* vs. *pouvoir*, which we will deal with later, and *signifiance* and *énoncé*, which we wrestled with the last few weeks.

Devenir is the infinitive form of the verb. Infinitive means unlimited, without temporal or logical restriction, that is, without a "tense" or a "mood." Now French can use the infinitive form as a noun: *un devenir*, "a to-become" or *un être*, "a to-be." English, obviously cannot do this, so Massumi translates *devenir* with "becoming." "Becoming," on the other hand, is in some cases a gerund, a verbal that functions as a noun: "a becoming" or in other cases a present participle, a verb form that functions as part of a verb phrase: "the wasp is becoming the orchid," or as a modifier: "the wasp, becoming the orchid ..." In these latter cases of becoming as a present participle, there is a temporal restriction to the present.

This is important to recognize because, as Deleuze/Guattari explains at *MP* 263E/322F, an infinitive, even though it is not temporally restricted, is not "indeterminate" with regard to time; rather it expresses the "floating, nonpulsed time proper to Aeon, in other words, the time of the pure event or of becoming." Deleuze/Guattari explains that the plane of consistency, the virtual realm of continuous variation, the BwO, has both a specific plane of content: haecceities or assemblages of unformed matters and pure functions or affects; and a specific plane of expression: indefinite article + proper name + infinitive verb. We thus have a clue as to "becoming": it is an event, a bifurcation, the actualization of which moves a system from one zone of its phase space to another.

2. Deleuze/Guattari will tell us outright how to think *devenir*: it is a "mutual but dissymmetric deterritorialization" (Dialogues 77F); it is the entry into a "symbiosis" (*MP* 238E/291F); the production of a new assemblage (257-8E/315F). What is real is the "the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (238E/291F). Let's take their favorite example, the wasp-orchid. The orchid becomes necessary to the life of the wasp and vice versa: what is primary is the new assemblage, the wasp-orchid machine. The becoming of wasp-orchid does not have a subject separate from itself: it's not that the wasp, say, stays the same and merely adds a new property to the set of properties that defines it. Nor is there a goal or finish (or "term" = terminus) separate from the block of becoming, for the other in the pair is also changed by its entry into the new assemblage. In complexity theory terms, the new assemblage, the symbiosis, is marked by emergent properties above and beyond the sum of the parts. It is also important to remember that a becoming is a combination of heterogeneous parts; it is an alliance rather than a filiation, an "unnatural participation," a "marriage against nature," a "transversal communication." Keith Ansell Pearson cites Lynn Margulis' revolutionary work in contemporary biology on mitochondrial capture as the origin of the eukaryotic (nucleated) cells as a heterogeneous becoming, a symbiosis that produces a new assemblage (*Viroid Life*, 132)..

3. A few words on "becoming" in two of its most important instances in the history of philosophy.

A. Hegel's *Science of Logic* begins with the triad: Being–Nothing–Becoming [*Sein–Nichts–Werden*]. The first, most general and most abstract thought possible is that of pure being, pure immediacy, or pure intuition with no determination whatsoever. But this thought is also precisely the thought of nothing at all: it is the pure form of thought with no content whatsoever. But this thought of nothing can not be held onto either and the thought then moves to Becoming. We thus recognize that Being, pure self-identity, and its absolute opposite, Nothing, are interchangeable. This sameness means we can never isolate being and nothing, for they have always already gone over into each other: "What is the truth is neither being nor nothing, but that being--does not pass over but has passed over--into nothing, and nothing into being." (83/82-83). As Gadamer shows, the "always already" of "has passed over" [*übergegangen ist*] indicates the circularity of the system. Spirit is always on the move, the movement generated by an originary splitting (being and nothing are opposites) that is always already a healing (being and nothing are the same). The sameness of being and nothing is not self-identity as simple undifferentiation, but as the always already accomplished disappearance into each other of what is absolutely different. Becoming, then is the basic movement of Hegel's Logic, and thus of thought and nature and spirit, the elements of the system

But just what purchase on real becoming does one gain by examining pure thought (or pure consciousness, the correlate of pure thought which Hegel examines in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*)? None at all, Deleuze writes. Michael Hardt has pointed out that Deleuze's early Bergson work is the locus of Deleuze's working through of his hatred of Hegel. Deleuze writes

in *Bergsonism*: "To Bergson, it seems that in this type of dialectical method one begins with concepts that, like baggy clothes, are much too big. The One in general, the multiple in general, nonbeing in general ... of what use is a dialectic that believes itself to be reunited with the real when it compensates for the inadequacy of a concept that is too broad or too general by invoking the opposite concept, which is no less broad and general? ... The singular will never be attained by correcting a generality with another generality" (44E).

B. Nietzsche contrasts Being and Becoming. While Deleuze and D/G are obviously more sympathetic to Nietzsche than to Hegel, Nietzsche's concept of Becoming is not that which animates Plateau 10. For Nietzsche, Being is the privilege of stability over change, of substance over event. Becoming is the insistence on the "eventualizing" of substance: rather than being

a substance with properties all things are events of capture and escape, the outcome of struggles of forces against each other, struggles that are stabilized in relations of power via a process of "interpretation." Now for Nietzsche, a substance with properties is a fiction produced by the "metaphysics of grammar," that is, a projection of the subject -- predicate structure of Indo-European languages onto the inhabitants of the world, so that they are seen as substances with predicates. (Although it is possible to give more interesting readings of him, I have to admit that Aristotle's text can yield a prime example of the analogy between the structures of language and reality: this analogy is reflected in the term *logos*: language, logic, ratio, structure of the world.)

The metaphysics of grammar is at root a phenomenon of a weak will that separates a force from that it can do: the weak "could have" been strong, but they "chose" not to--thus the sin of the strong is not their strength, but their acting on their strength. This separates a subject underneath of action. For Nietzsche, a force goes to the limit of its strength: or at least that is the definition of nobility. In any event, Nietzschean Becoming is much too much a cosmic concept for D/G's use in this plateau, where it designates the most concrete of actions.

4. Spinoza. The real philosophical heritage upon which D/G draw in the central "ontology" section of plateau 10 is Spinoza. There is a brief mention of Bergson early in the plateau during the discussion of blocks of becoming, but let's defer any discussion of Bergson to a later meeting.

Deleuze's two works on Spinoza are marvels. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* was Deleuze's submission to the jury for his *doctorat d'état* in 1968; *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* is a little gem, the work in which Deleuze's love for the object of his writing shines forth most clearly. Deleuze is extravagant in his praise of Spinoza in his interviews and writings: "the prince of philosophers"; "the Christ of philosophy" (to which Alain Badiou, whose *Deleuze: Le clameur de l'être* is the most challenging of the recent French reactions to Deleuze [along with Alliez, Mengue, Zourabichvili], adds that Deleuze was "one of his most considerable apostles" [150]).

Reading Spinoza's *Ethics (Demonstrated by the Order of Geometry)* is without a doubt one of the most exhilarating experiences available to students of western philosophy. Deleuze sets a passage from Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* as the epigraph to *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. In it, a poor and poorly educated man explains to a judge how he felt upon reading Spinoza: "I found it in a junkyard in a nearby town, paid a kopek and left cursing myself for wasting money hard to come by. Later I read through a few pages and kept on going as though there were a whirlwind at my back. As I say, I didn't understand every word, but when you're dealing with such ideas you feel as though you were taking a witch's ride. After that I wasn't the same man ..." (The feeling I had reading *Anti-Oedipus* for the first time!).

What draws Deleuze to Spinoza? Immanence. Spinoza refuses all transcendence. His single substance, *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature, an equivalence) saturates existence. Its two attributes (or more precisely, the two attributes accessible to us) thought and extension, are, because immanent to the same substance, univocal expressions of that substance. Spinoza thus refuses the reserve of negative theology (the substance saturates the world with no reserve) and the analogical being of positive theologies that propose a transcendent God (God/Nature is fully expressed in its attributes; there is no supereminence to God's being in relation to the being of thought and extension in the world). In D/G terms, God/Nature is a plane of consistency or desiring-production itself as the being of the world.

Spinoza's theory of bodies is also very attractive to Deleuze. Bodies for Spinoza are assemblages: Part II, Proposition 13, Definition: "When any given bodies of the same or different magnitude are compelled by other bodies to remain in contact, or if they be moved at the same or different rates of speed, so that their mutual movements should preserve among

themselves a certain fixed relation, we say that such bodies are in union, and that together they compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from other bodies by this union." Notice that bodies are not composed of definite types of stuff, but by achieved relationships of speed or rest. Earlier Spinoza writes: "Bodies are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness, and not in respect of substance" (II P13 Lemma I). We see D/G explicating this notion of body in "Memories of a Spinozist I." A body is composed: it is an assemblage of parts whose relative motions are able to be preserved for a time in a ratio of capture and escape, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. D/G call this the "longitude" of a body (256E/313F).

"Memories of a Spinozist II" deals with "latitude," which is the set of affects of a body, the set of actions of which it is capable. "Affects are becomings," D/G write: affects are the set of incorporeal transformations, the bifurcations that move a body into a different region of its phase space, that is, that allow it to enter new assemblages, new forms of interminglings with other bodies to form new machines. As capacities, affects are virtual or intensive as opposed to the extensive parts that form the longitude of a body. Affects are "what a body can do" (Deleuze loves to quote Spinoza to the effect that "we do not know what the body is capable of" -- we do not know [a priori], and hence we must experiment. Defining bodies by affects is not the same as by genus/species (this relies on the substance-properties model). Grouping bodies by affects breaks open the organic stratum to the "machinic phylum" that cuts across it: for example, a race horse has more in common with a race car or speed boat than with a plow horse, which is closer to an ox than to the race horse.

In "Memories of a Haecceity," D/G bring the two previous Spinozist points together: "On the PC, a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude." This mode of individuation is called by D/G haecceity, recalling Duns Scotus' use of the term for singular being. A haecceity is an assemblage, a certain relation of particles in motion or rest giving rise to a set of affects. This is an individuation, but not that of a subject or substance. Examples are "five in the evening" or a life: a set of matters and functions on a PC individuated from others on that PC. Here we see a theme familiar to us from our study of the Geology of Morals: D/G's insistence that the virtual is not chaos but is inhabited by its own denizens. This refuses the transcendence or chaos forced choice (Louis XVI: "après nous, le déluge"). The time of the PC is Aeon, as we remarked at the beginning of the lecture.

D/G do not detail it here, but Spinoza's ethics and politics are fascinating. (Here I rely on Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* [Minnesota, 1993], a model of clarity.) The train of thought is the following. Affects can be either passive (external cause) or active (internal cause). Encounters with others produce either joy or sadness, depending on whether the other body is composable with ours, that is, whether the new assemblage results in an increase or diminution of our strength. So we can have either passive sad or joyful encounters or active joyful or sad encounters. Spinoza's realism makes him say that most of our encounters are passive sad. But we do have the principle of selection: move to the active and the joyful. Spinozist politics is arranging a system of joyful encounters that tend to more activity and more joy. This is only possible through the puissance of democracy rather than the pouvoir of the State, which precisely relies on the multiplication of sad passions, as D/G recall for us in *Anti-Oedipus* in quoting Spinoza: the prime question of political philosophy: how can desire desire its own repression? "Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?" (AO 29) How can people possibly reach the point of shouting: "More taxes! Less bread!"

In the insistence on joy rather than pleasure we see a key difference between D/G and Foucault. For D/G pleasure is the subjective appropriation of the shared energy field that is joy, while for Foucault, pleasure is the (notorious) rallying cry for resistance to bio-power and the dispositif of sexuality at the close of *History of Sexuality I*: "bodies and pleasures." (Resistance to power, by the way, is the other major difference: for D/G, the line of flight is primary, and power relations are secondary phenomena of reterritorialization; hence resistance is reactive.)